

Shadow Dancing

by Susanne Barringer

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>AUTHOR: Susanne Barringer
EMAIL: sbarringer@usa.net
>ARCHIVE: Gossamer no. Anywhere else okay with these headers attached.
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>SUMMARY: Post-ep for "all things." A different perspective on the teaser and beyond.
DISCLAIMER: Characters aren't mine. Borrowed. Didn't pay for them. Won't.
>
THANKS one more time (never enough) to Suzanne, whose taste I appreciate more than I can say, and for bearing with me for yet another round of "how about this title?" :)
>
I wrote this before "Requiem" aired, but I think it's still plausible.
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>
I awaken to the soft plodding of footsteps in my living room. My heart lurches momentarily in that way that comes from being awakened by a sound one knows shouldn't be there. Then I remember. It's Scully. She fell asleep on my sofa last night, although I am surprised she slept for as long as she did.
>
After I tucked the blanket around her, I thought about moving her, either to my bed or at least into a more comfortable position, but decided it wasn't worth the risk. She needed to sleep after what she'd been through. I left a pillow for her in case she woke up and wanted to stretch out.
>
Unable to sleep, I checked on her again an hour later. She must have woken up long enough to take off her jacket and lie down. Her head rested on the pillow and she was curled into a ball, looking entirely at ease and sound asleep. Assured that she would be comfortable now and wouldn't wake with a multitude of aches and

pains, I was finally able to fall asleep myself.

>
She must have been exhausted, as was I. A seven-hour flight to England and back in two days will do that to a person, not to mention camping out all night in a field waiting for crop circles. The trip hadn't been what I hoped, but not because the circles never materialized. Not until the long flight home did I admit to myself that crop circles were only half the reason I'd proposed the cross-ocean jaunt. I had been looking forward to time with Scully away from work, away from the insanity of our recent cases.

>
I can't say I was surprised, however, when she turned down my invitation. I don't think she realized it wasn't the paranormal I was seeking. Scully and I are great partners, but constantly at cross-purposes when it comes to the personal. We talk in crop circles when we mean so much more.

>
I see Scully's shadow fall across the doorway and quickly shut my eyes before she enters. I don't know why, but it seems the right thing to do. I don't want her to feel like she has to talk to me if she doesn't want to. She said a lot last night, more than she ever has before. It might take some time before she feels comfortable about that. It shouldn't, but I certainly don't want to make her feel uneasy. If she thinks I'm asleep, at least she's not forced to confront what's changed between us.

>
I feel something light hit the bed, then sense her move into the bathroom. She tries to shut the bathroom door but it squeaks loudly. I've been meaning to WD-40 the hinges forever. She sighs heavily, and I suspect she's weighing her options--which is more likely to wake me, the door or her washing up? She must give the door another experimental push, for there's a short squeal, then nothing.

>
A few moments later, the sink faucet turns on, so I guess she's decided to give up on closing the door. I'm glad. Perhaps it's voyeuristic, but I find it comforting to listen to Scully's morning preparations, as if she belongs right here every morning.

>
Through my eyelids I see the bathroom light come on. I keep my eyes closed in case she peeks out to see if the light has wakened me, as I suspect she does. My heart is racing, though I don't know why. The intimacy of this scenario is something for which I'm not prepared. Hell, the intimacy of last night was something for which I wasn't even close to being prepared.

>
How incredible it was to hear her tell me about what she had seen. The most astonishing part was that she did it of her own volition. I didn't have to question the information out of her like I usually do, and even her standard disclaimer of "At least I thought that's what I saw" was noticeably absent. She spilled it all with so little hesitation, and my awe at her trust in me, at the way she confessed to things that a few years ago she would have found too embarrassingly unscientific, remains even in the cold light of morning. Something has changed--with her or with us. I'm amazed that we've come so far that she can trust what she sees, and then trust me enough to share it.

>
Even more impressive than her confessions of what she saw, however, was her telling me about her past with Daniel and the conflict she had been through in the last couple of days. Despite the small surges of jealousy I felt, not of him now but of who he had been to her in the past, I was still movably touched by her sharing that part of her life with me. I could sense the struggle she had been through, both with him and with herself.

>
The water continues to run in the sink and I figure the situation is safe now. I open my eyes slowly. Her jacket is sitting on the bed at my feet, and the light shines brightly through the open

bathroom door. I wish, with a little stab of guilt, that I had a better view. I can see the movement of her blurred shadow against the wall outside the bathroom, a dance of gray limbs and dark echoes. I cannot see her at all, although occasionally her movement causes an elbow or hand to protrude into my view.

>
I watch her shadow, the way it bends and straightens, enlarges and shrinks against the wall. There's no way to know what she's doing. The water turns off and I hear the cabinet below the sink open. She's probably looking for a clean towel. Unfortunately, I'm pretty sure there aren't any. The cabinet shuts. I suppose she decides to use one of the towels hanging on the rack, one of mine. God, will I ever recover from this?

>
Just when I think maybe I've let this voyeurism go on too long, I hear the thunk of the toilet seat being lowered. Damn. This is above and beyond intrusive, so I close my eyes again and force myself not to listen. I think about the way she looked last night asleep, how soft her skin seemed when I touched her, how her hair fell across her face in such a way that made her look like a child. When I tucked that blanket around her, my thought was of how small she seemed, how vulnerable. Sharing her story had given her release. She fell asleep, her face turned toward me as if needing me in her sleep. What I wouldn't give for her to need me every night like that.

>
I studied her, but not long, afraid my intense observation would wake her but too tempted by the opportunity to pass it up. Even my touch didn't rouse her, so comfortable she was, asleep in my apartment, next to me, under my care.

>
Now those thoughts make my groin tighten and I can't help but feel a bit of remorse that the evening ended as it did. I would never begrudge Scully any decision she made about us, but there was a moment when it seemed like our conversation was going somewhere important. I'm sure I sounded like an idiot with my babbling, but I had suddenly become nervous for a reason I can only now appreciate. Perhaps it's best that she fell asleep before the moment was forced to become something else. It's not the right time.

>
The flush of the toilet signals me that I can go back to listening and watching. Shortly after, the water in the sink runs again briefly, then quits. There are long moments of silence and I try not to allow my imagination to run away with me. What is she doing? I'm just about to shift my position to see if I can get a better view when the shadow on the wall looms large and then the light turns off.

>
I quickly shut my eyes and lie still. There's a swish of fabric as she puts on her jacket. I feel a twinge of disappointment when she walks out of the room with barely a hesitation, not even to stop and look. My heart started pounding in anticipation as soon as she flicked off the bathroom light. What did I expect? Did I really think that she would stop to wake me to talk about last night, or maybe even crawl into bed next to me and take me in her arms? We've changed, but not that much.

>
I hear her walking around the living room, making her way across the room, around the coffee table. It's amazing how attuned my senses are to her, how easily I can sense her movement through the room. She is looking for her keys, I bet. When she came in last night she set them on the bookshelf. She must've forgotten. They're on the bookshelf. I try to send her the message psychically and almost laugh at the thought. Of course, given what she told me last night, she just might pay attention to a psychic message these days.

>
The floorboards creak under her feet as she makes another circle around the room, still looking. I'm just beginning to think I should get up to tell her where they are when I hear a pause, then the clink

of keys in her hands. She found them.

>
I'm surprised when the footsteps suddenly turn and come toward the bedroom. She's coming back. I can't imagine for what. I hear her hesitate inside the door, and I struggle not to open my eyes to look at her. My heart pounds faster. She comes nearer to the bed, her close proximity something I feel rather than see. She stands beside me for several moments. I imagine clenching my teeth to avoid movement. She can't know I'm awake.

>
She's watching me. I'm torn between wanting to allow it, fair turnabout since I studied her last night, and wanting to move to break the incredible heat of her stare. I can feel her gaze running over my body, which is prudently covered for the most part. The mattress shifts slightly as she leans onto it to stoop beside the bed. One hand comes up to touch the top of my head, her thumb stroking over my forehead.

>
"Mulder?" she says softly. "I'm sorry to wake you."

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I open my eyes to turn and look at her. I can't see her face. The room is dark but the light comes in from the window behind her, small sparkles glistening off the hair around her head. Her face is in shadow but I can still see her eyes.

>
"I just wanted to tell you I was leaving. Thanks for letting me stay here last night."

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I don't say anything, just look across at her. Her hand continues to stroke across my forehead. There's a long moment when neither of us speak. I can hear my breathing whispering in my head; hers seems equally shallow and fast.

>
"I'll see you at the office later," she murmurs. Her voice is soft, yet there's something lingering underneath it, like cobwebs.

>
She stands up then, both her hands pressing down onto the edge of the mattress which bends under her weight; gravity draws my body toward hers. Just as she steps away, I reach out and manage to grab hold of her wrist, my fingers encircling her. She turns back and looks at me, then laces her fingers gently through mine. I'm not sure why I did it. I'm not even sure what it is that I want to say. She squints down at me in the darkness.

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It turns out I have nothing to say, just some need to watch her a little while longer, to keep the contact between us a few more moments.

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She doesn't allow me much time before she speaks again. "I'll see you later, okay? I'm sorry. I shouldn't have woken you."

>
She gives my hand a squeeze and steps away. When she reaches the doorway, however, she turns around to look back at me, one hand resting on the door frame, her body angled back inside the room. Despite the dimness of the setting, I can picture the look on her face, the expression of hesitation. Does she want to come back?

>
I think for a moment if I had to choose a way to remember Scully, it would be like this. There's a certain vulnerability about her, still a little disheveled despite the freshening up, not sure if she's coming or going, not sure if she should stay or leave. She is torn between me and herself.

>
I turn on my side to face her, wondering if I can will her to stay the same way I willed her to find her keys, but also knowing if she chose to stay now the timing would be wrong.

>
After all the hours she spent with Daniel, worrying about him, being faced head-on with her life decisions, wondering if she had made the right choices, it's only natural that she would need some time for reflection. This is not the moment for us. She needs time to

settle into the realization that she isn't who she used to be, and I need time to remind her that I'm not Daniel.

>
Ultimately, I take comfort in the fact that once again she has chosen me, although she didn't say so in so many words. But Scully has a way of making it clear what she needs. From the way she talked to me last night, the way she confided in me, the way she relaxed and let me in, I understand.

>
She will face the decision of this moment again, whether it's tomorrow or next week or next month. Her choice won't always be the same one she makes today.

>
The stillness of early dawn creeps into the room, along with the burgeoning light. Her shadow falls angled and broken across the bed. She doesn't move for the longest time. Finally, she turns and walks away without looking back. I hear some shuffling as she gathers up her things, then her shoes thudding on the floor. The front door opens and closes and I am left alone, breathless yet contented.

>
The choice, the one that matters, has already been made.

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END

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>Send feedback and I'll do the Macarena: sbarringer@usa.net

>All my stories located at http://www.geocities.com/s_barringer

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